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Morning Lights and Evening Shadows

Rossiter Johnson

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MORNING LIGHTS AND EVENING SHADOWS

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Morning Lights and Evening Shadows

BY

ROSSITER JOHNSON

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MORNING LIGHTS AND EVENING SHADOWS

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Morning Lights and Evening Shadows

A Song for a New Year.

The sea sings the song of the ages,
The mountain stands mutely sublime,
While the blank of Eternity's pages
Is filled by the fingers of Time.
But Man robs the sea of its wonder,
Making syllabled speech of its roar;
He rendeth the mountain asunder,
And rolleth his wheels through its core;
He delveth deep down for earth's treasure,
And every locked secret unbars:
He scanneth the heavens at pleasure,
And writeth his name on the stars.

But purpose is weaker than passion,
And patience is dearer than blood;
And his face groweth withered and ashen,
Ere he findeth and graspeth the good.

He pursueth the phantom of beauty,
Or peddleth his valor for pelf,
Till the iron of merciless Duty
Hath cloven the armor of self.
He soweth the life of his brother,
He wasteth the half of his soul;
The harvest is reaped by another,
And Death dippeth deep for his toll.

So the march of triumphal procession,
That Science were fain to begin,
Is hindered with painful digression
Of ignorance, folly, and sin.
Through mazes of needless confusion
The story of Freedom must bend,
And the grandest and simplest conclusion
Go stumbling along to its end.
Yet a year does not slide o'er the border
Of time but some progress it shows;
And a lustrum proves prescience and order:
Thus the drama creeps on to its close.

If the blood that was weaker than water
Too thinly and sluggishly ran,

Lo ! the wine of the vintage of slaughter
Giveth strength to the sinews of Man.
And the shout of a lusty young nation
Now greets his gray brothers with glee ;
And the swell of its ringing vibration
Sweeps over the isles of the sea ;
While Liberty looks for a morrow
That promiseth joyous increase,
As waneth her midnight of sorrow
And waxeth her morning of peace.

The Victory.

When Man, in his Maker's image, came
To be the lord of the new-made earth,
To conquer its forests, its beasts to tame,
To gather its treasures and know their worth,
All readily granted his power and place,
Save the Ocean, the Mountain, and Time, and Space;
And these four sneered at his puny frame,
And made of his lordship a theme for mirth.

Whole ages passed while his flocks he tended,
And delved and dreamed, as the years went by,
Till there came an age when his genius splendid
Had bridged the rivers, and sailed the sky,
And raised the dome that defied the storm,
And mastered the beauties of color and form;
But his power was lost, his dominion ended,
Where Time, Space, Mountain, or Sea was nigh.

The Mountains rose in their grim inertness
Between the peoples, and made them strange,

Save as in moments of pride or pertness
They climbed the ridge of their native range,
And, looking down on the tribe below,
Saw nothing there but a deadly foe,
Heard only a war-cry, long and shrill,
In echoes leaping from hill to hill.

The Ocean rolled in its mighty splendor,
Washing the slowly wasting shore,
And the voices of nations, fierce or tender,
Lost themselves in its endless roar.
With frail ships launched on its treacherous surge,
And sad eyes fixed on its far blue verge,
Man's hold of life seemed brittle and slender,
And the Sea his master for evermore.

And Space and Time brought their huge dimensions
To separate man from his brother man,
And sowed between them a thousand dissensions,
That ripened in hatred and caste and clan.
So Sea and Mountain and Time and Space
Laughed again in his lordship's face,
And bade him blush for his weak inventions
And the narrow round his achievements ran.

But one morning he made him a slender wire,
As an artist's vision took life and form,
While he drew from heaven the strange fierce fire
That reddens the edge of the midnight storm;
And he carried it over the Mountain's crest,
And dropped it into the Ocean's breast;
And Science proclaimed, from shore to shore,
That Time and Space ruled man no more.

Then the brotherhood lost on Shinar's plain
Came back to the peoples of earth again.
"Be one!" sighed the Mountain, and shrank away.
"Be one!" murmured Ocean, in dashes of spray.
"Be one!" said Space, "I forbid no more."
"Be one!" echoed Time, "till my years are o'er."
"We are one!" said the nations, as hand met hand
In a thrill electric from land to land.

Faith's Surrender.

As vanquished years behind me glide,
  Trailing the banner of their boasts,
Lo! step for step and stride for stride,
  Beside me walk their silent ghosts.
Each, while a narrow moment burned,
  The breath of full existence shared;
Then mortal Substance backward turned,
  Immortal Shadow onward fared.

  Between the doing and the dreaming,
    My slack hands fall;
  Between the being and the seeming,
    My senses pall;
  And swiftly through life's broken arches
  Care with his troop triumphant marches,
    And claims me thrall.

There ever, 'mid the moving throng
  Whose mocking footfalls echo mine,
Poor widowed Memory leads along
  Her children in a lengthened line.

What time the head in silence hung,
I knew them by that voiceless sign —
Their tender forms forever young,
Their weary eyes as old as mine.

Between retreating and encroaching
Their footprints lie;
Between beseeching and reproaching
Their voices die;
And every scheme of better living
They mar with blotches of misgiving,
And thrust it by.

The one foul word in record fair
Stands out the foremost on the page,
Till all of good or glory there
Seems chance-achieved or shrunk with age;
The present help of manly strength,
The royal sway of manly will,
However bold, go down at length
Before some iron-visored ill.

Betwixt old baulk and new beginning,
How Courage quails!
'Twixt white intent and stain of sinning,
How Virtue fails!

And backward on her own path turning,
Where Hazard's lurid torch is burning,
How Reason pales!

From self the subtle motive spun,
Through self the generous purpose burns,
For self the martyr deed is done,
And round to self at last returns
The boon for others dearly bought,
The far result of sacrifice,
That triumphs in completed thought,
Or lights a gleam in dying eyes.

Betwixt grim fact and sad surmising,
Joys merge in pain;
'Twixt love of self and self-despising,
What grounds remain
Where Hope is lord and Fear is vassal,
Where calm Content may build her castle,
Nor build in vain?

Though Truth be steadfast as the hills
Whose flinty faces mock at Time,
What boots it, if no living rills
Roll downward from that steep sublime?

I could not hold its airy height,
Though I should tread the narrow track,
While trembling foot and failing sight
Conspire too well to hurl me back.

Between the climbing and the creeping,
There's blood and bruise;
Between the laughing and the weeping,
The soul may lose
Her grasp of all that makes the morrow
Seem other than a greener sorrow,
With fresher dews.

The Dark Herald.

The world is beautiful, and life is sweet,
And home sufficient heaven, to those that love.
Yet something happier were they if the feet
Of the Dark Herald, like the spheres above,
Moved in a steadfast orbit and came round
In some determined cycle to their door,
Commanding all together to give ground
For the new mortals waiting off the shore.

Then might they do their work, and live their life,
And love their loves, and go in calm content,
Taking the hands of brother, sister, wife,
For the long journey and its far event.
Then might they know with not a shade of doubt —
What now they argue from a fear of sin —
That He who made the mighty world without
Sustains and loves the weakest soul therein.

But who can see the brightest and the best
Snatched from the sight of those that need them here,

See active life become eternal rest,
  See parents weeping o'er their children's bier,
See age a burden and see youth grow pale,
  See what the weak and innocent endure—
Nor feel that laws of Nature somehow fail
  Just where their working should be most secure?

Brevi Finietur.

I sometimes think my life has run
  Beyond the measure of its worth,
And wonder when will rise the sun,
  The last that I shall see on earth.
Again, life's brevity appears
  The only marplot; and I plan
  How all might round to right, if man
Could only live some hundred years.

But evermore this mournful thread
  Through all reflection's fabric runs:
That if this dear one were not dead,
  Were that one still the same as once,
Had these a few more years been spared,
And all my later fortune shared,
Contented then I had not cared
  For what might lie beyond the suns;

That loss and blunders manifold,
  Which mar our brief existence here,

Were not its knell so quickly tolled,
  Might be redeemed some future year;
Then he who faltered at the start
And failed, were not the course so short,
Might, by some latent force or art,
  Have won the race, the prize, the cheer.

Opportunity.

Not idly dreaming of Thy heaven,
  Nor longing for some vague delight,
With scorn of such as time has given,
  Nor blind to glories of the night
With watching for the break of dawn,
Nor mourning good forever gone,
Far from my fellow men withdrawn,
  Would I Thy mercies, Lord, requite.

The great to-come is Thine alone;
  The past, we know not whose it is;
Its days and deeds are all its own,
  And mine, mayhap, its miseries.
But though all things beyond may be
Obscured in hazy drapery,
One little circle round is free
  From darkness, doubt, and mysteries.

That little circle, now and here,
  Moves onward with me as I go;

That hazy curtain hanging near
Rolls backward with continual flow:
And still my growing pathway glides
Where some divine impulsion guides,
And still Thy firmament abides,
And through the mist its beacons glow.

The measure of Thy work is more
Than I may ever hope to span
With compass of the little lore
That puffs the mind of puny man.
I only know that round my feet
Lie shreds of purpose incomplete,
Which I must help to form and meet,
Revealing Thy eternal plan.

I only know that in my heart
Somehow there must be something good;
Thou wouldst not set my task apart
And give me stubble, hay, and wood,
And these alone, that my desire
Might build in mockery a pyre
But meant for the consuming fire,
Where otherwise some hope had stood.

Though, fair ambition's banner furled,
And every outlook growing less,
I elbow through a crowded world,
With daily toil and strife and stress,
If eye and heart to heaven be true,
Some bit of sky I still may view,
And from that little arc of blue
The sphere of Thy creation guess.

On the Cliff.

"See where the crest of the long promontory,
Decked by October in crimson and brown,
Lies like the scene of some fairyland story,
Over the sands to the deep sloping down.
See the white mist on the hidden horizon
Hang like the folds of the curtain of fate.
See where yon shadow the green water flies on,
Cast from a cloud for the conclave too late.

"See the small ripples in curving ranks chasing
Every light breeze running out from the shore,
Gleeful as children when merrily racing,
Hands interlocked, o'er a wide meadow floor.
See round the pier how the tossing wave sparkles,
Bright as the hope in a love-lighted breast.
See the one sail in the sunlight that darkles,
Laboring home from the lands of the west.

"See the low surf where it restlessly tumbles,
Swiftly advancing, and then in retreat.

See how the tall cliff yields slowly and crumbles,
Sliding away to the gulfs at our feet.
Sure is thy victory, emblem of weakness;
Certain thine overthrow, ponderous wall.
Brittle is sternness, but mighty is meekness—
O wave that will conquer! O cliff that must
fall!"

"Ah lady, how deep is this truth of your teaching!
All that delights and inthralls you I see;
But little you dream of the meaning far-reaching,
Yea, more than you meant them, your words
have for me.
Light run my fancies that once were too sober;
All the fair land of the future lies spread
Brightly before me, in hues of October;
Homeward, full-laden, my ship turns her head.

"Dimly across them falls fate's mystic curtain:
If but thy fingers would draw it away,
Making the fanciful turn to the certain,
Then would the sounds and the sights of to-day

Ring like the strains of a ballad pathetic,
Heard when the voice of the singer is dumb;
Glow like the great words on pages prophetic,
Read when the fingers that wrote them are numb.

"Into the depths of thy dreamy eyes peering,
Watching thy lips for some shadowy sign,
Trembling in doubt betwixt hoping and fearing,
Stands my poor soul, and appeals unto thine.
Barren as sea-sand is every ambition,
Pride but the foam in the breaker concealed;
Fame is a shadow, and wealth a derision —
O love that will triumph! O life that must yield!"

A Photograph.

A flash of daylight on a darkened plate —
And lip and brow and eye
Some portion of their inmost thought relate
In tones that do not die.

The instant message of a single look,
With love and hope alight,
Is like the broad page of an open book
To him who reads aright.

Yet sometimes, though the picture be ablaze
With life's most precious meed,
The careless handle, and the many gaze,
But only one can read.

On the Stairs.

Swift tho' the foot-fall of midnight advances,
Let us linger a while on the stairs —
Nothing to witness our words and our glances
But the astral that over us flares.
Ah, how in contrast with gloomy November
The gleam of their brilliance appears!
You may forget them, but I shall remember —
Remember these glances for years.

Press but the fingers for needless assurance,
Touch the lips for a token of truth —
Ah, how it girds for heroic endurance
The pitiful weakness of youth!
So rises purpose that never shall slumber,
So rings its brave song in my ears;
You may forget them, but I must remember —
Remember these moments for years.

What tho' the spirit be robbed of its buoyance,
Still wrapped in the cumbersome clay?

What tho' the wear of incessant annoyance
Shall fritter endeavor away,
Turn the fair June into dull-eyed December,
Drown exultation in tears?
You may forget them, but I shall remember—
Remember these moments for years.

Even as now I pass out of the portal
To the slumberous silence of night,
So if Remembrance, immured but immortal,
From the dwelling of earth take her flight,
Then, when the ashes of life's falling ember
Are lighted with flickering fears,
You may forget them, while I shall remember
These moments surviving the years.

Dedication.

If that indeed were fact, which seems
A pleasant universal fiction,
That's daily born of youthful dreams,
Nor dies of daily contradiction —

That every mortal has a mate,
And counterparts go blindly groping
To find perchance through fogs of fate
The end of all their weary hoping,—

I'd say: Whatever I have done
To manhood's earnest work befitting,
Be consecrate to her alone
Who waits for me, though all unwitting;

Who puts the signs of pain away,
Lest grief too soon her cheek should furrow;
Who beats temptation back to-day,
That I may see some glad to-morrow;

Who dare not pluck a flower that grows
  Beyond the path God spreads before her,
Nor ever thinks of passing those
  That bloom beside it to adore her;

Who strives to add a cubit yet
  By faith unto her moral stature —
Dear soul! — lest I should feel regret
  At finding less than mine her nature;

Whose hands train many a trailing vine
  That mine had rudely left to perish,
And all its tendrils deftly twine
  In folds that failing years will cherish;

Whose steps will mark life's tune alway,
  Though mine have stumbled, failed, and blundered;
Whose spirit walks with mine to-day,
  However far our feet are sundered.

A Love-Letter Without a Lady.

Is the new summer bursting as freshly as ever,
Along the smooth margin of old Genesee,
Where the trillium wakes with a lingering shiver
Beneath the low boughs of the evergreen tree?

Creeps the trailing arbutus o'er hillock and hollow,
Through leafage whose greenness and glory are fled?
Rises dawn with a flush of new glories to follow?
Comes the night with less terror and chill in its tread?

In the grottoes we know, are the sculptures of Winter
Made ruin and rubbish, the sport of the Spring?
From the great rocky walls do they crumble and splinter,
Whence newly-born rivulets saunter and sing?

Has the last shrunken drift from the meadows departed,
Like a stage-ghost at dawn, with the dust on its face?
O'er the long, grassy slopes have the cloud-shadows started,
As in summers of old, their perpetual chase?

Do you wander as once under cliff and through tangle,
By pools where cross-currents in dark eddies meet?
Or study the offers of crevice and angle
That hold out temptations to hazardous feet?

It is long, long ago now — and longer in seeming —
Since I stood with you by that river so fair.
But its ripple or roar, as it runs through my dreaming,
Has no meaning or music unless you are there.

There's a love that comes forth at the bidding of beauty,
And virtue, and goodness, 'twixt woman and man;
There's a love more allied to devotion and duty,
That owes its existence to kindred and clan.

There is also a love that no mystery darkens,
No passion need fire, and no blindness defend,
No whisper can hurt while suspiciousness hearkens,
No envy distract, and no jealousy rend.

It is born of the spirit that finds itself mated —
Or soaring or mining — by one of its kind;
That can follow it far, or await it belated,
Can lead it in freedom, or cheer it confined;

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That feels how it labors, or triumphs, or struggles;
That sees what it aims at, and knows why it fails;
That peers at a glance through the gauzes and juggles
That screen and succeed where no merit avails.

No thrill marks its birth, and no rapture its presence;
But it grows in each fibre by circumstance tried,
From boyhood to manhood through long juvenescence,—
And such 'tis I send you from Merrimack's side.

The Indian Trail.

In days agone, where rocky cliffs
  Rise far above the river's vale,
There was a path of doubts and ifs—
  We called it then the Indian Trail.

In ragged line, from top to base,
  O'er shelving crag and slippery shale,
By brush and brier and jumping-place,
  Wound up and down the Indian Trail.

No girl, though nimble as a fawn,
  No small-boy cautious as a snail,
No dog, no mule, no man of brawn,
  Could safely tread that Indian Trail.

Beyond the age of childish toy,
  Before the age of gun and sail,
The fearless and elastic boy
  Alone could use the Indian Trail.

'Twas like a great commencement day,
  Like change from little fish to whale,

From tearful March to smiling May,
When first we climbed the Indian Trail.

I've threaded many a devious maze,
And Alpine path without a rail,
Yet never felt such tipsy craze
As touched me on the Indian Trail.

'Twas easy by the White Man's Path
For all the lofty cliff to scale;
But boys returned from river bath
Preferred to take the Indian Trail.

Our younger brothers, who'd insist
Upon their rights of taggle-tail,
Were shaken off and never missed
When once we reached the Indian Trail.

And those who plundered orchard crop
Regarded not the farmer's hail,
But left him puzzled at the top,
While they went down the Indian Trail.

All this was years and years ago—
To count them now would not avail—
And every noble tree is low
That shadowed then the Indian Trail.

The beetling cliff — ah, what a sin ! —
Is full of vaults for beer and ale ;
The rocks are stained like toper's chin,
Where flourished once our Indian Trail.

They've stripped off every bush and flower,
From Vincent to Deep Hollow dale ;
The charm is sunk, the memory sour —
There is no more an Indian Trail.

Far driven from our hunting-ground
On breezy hill and billowy swale,
Some wander still, but some have found
The skyward end of Indian Trail.

Dear boys ! it takes away my breath
To think how youth and genius fail.
Those grim pursuers, Time and Death,
Are baffled by no Indian Trail.

Life yields such comfort as it hath,
But labor wears and custom stales ;
I plod all day the White Man's Path,
And dream at night of Indian Trails.

Laurence.

He came in the glory of summer; in the terror of summer he went:
Like a blossom the breezes have wafted; like a bough that the tempest has rent.
His blue eyes unclosed in the morning, his brown eyes were darkened at morn;
And the durance of pain could not banish the beauty wherewith he was born.
He came — can we ever forget it, while the years of our pilgrimage roll? —
He came in thine anguish of body, he passed 'mid our anguish of soul.

He brought us a pride and a pleasure, he left us a pathos of tears:
A dream of impossible futures, a glimpse of uncalendared years.
His voice was a sweet inspiration, his silence a sign from afar;
He made us the heroes we were not, he left us the cowards we are.

For the moan of the heart follows after his clay,
with perpetual dole,
Forgetting the torture of body is lost in the triumph
of soul.

A man in the world of his cradle, a sage in his in-
fantine lore,
He was brave in the might of endurance, was pa-
tient — and who can be more?
He had learned to be shy of the stranger, to wel-
come his mother's warm kiss,
To trust in the arms of his father, — and who can
be wiser than this?
The lifetime we thought lay before him, already
was rounded and whole,
In dainty completeness of body and wondrous per-
fection of soul.

The newness of love at his coming, the freshness
of grief when he went,
The pitiless pain of his absence, the effort at argued
content,
The dim eye forever retracing the few little foot-
prints he made,

The quick thought forever recalling the visions that never can fade,—
For these but one comfort, one answer, in faith's or philosophy's roll:
Came to us for a pure little body, went to God for a glorified soul.

Evelyn.

If I could know
That here about the place where last you played—
Within this room, and yonder in the shade
Of branches low—
Your spirit lingered, I would never go,
But evermore a hermit pace the round
Of sunny paths across this garden ground,
And o'er the fleckered lawn
Whereon your little chariot was drawn,
And round these lonely walls,
Where no sound ever falls
So pretty as your prattle or your crow,—
If I could only know!

If I could know
That to some distant clime or planet rare
Sweet souls like thine repair,
Where love's own fountains fail not as they flow,—
I'd be a traveller, and would ever go,
Day after day, along the selfsame road,
Leaving behind this desolate abode,

My head upon my pillow only lay
To dream myself still farther on the way,
Until at last I rest,
Clasping my little daughter to my breast,
Though half eternity were wasted so,—
If I could only know!

If I could know
That you a child with childlike ways remain,
I'd never wish to be a man again,
But only try to grow
As childlike, using all the idle toys
That you and I have played with, till their noise
Brought back the echoes of your merry laugh,
When paper windmill whirled upon its staff,
Or painted ball went rolling on the floor,
Or puss peeped out behind the door,
Or watch, held half in fear,
With its mysterious pulses thrilled your ear:
All manly occupation I'd forego,
If I could only know!

If I could know
That henceforth, in some pure eternal sphere,
The little life that grew so swiftly here
Would still expand and grow,

How should I strive against my wasting years,
With toil from sun to sun, and midnight tears,
To build my soul up to the height of yours,
And catch the light that lures,
The inspiration that impels,
The strength that dwells,
Beyond the bounds of earthly cares and fears,
Beyond this bitter woe,—
If I could only know!

Alas! what do I know?
I know your world scarce compassed yonder stone—
As little seems my own!
I know you never knew unhappiness—
Would I could mourn the less!
I know you never saw death's darker side—
The shore where we abide!
I know you never felt the nameless dread—
Ah, but if mine were fled!
I know you never heard a lover's vow—
And I'm your lover now!
I know no answer to my wail can come—
Let me be dumb!

A Soldier Poet.

(Michael O'Connor, 1837–1862.)

Where swell the songs thou shouldst have sung
By peaceful rivers yet to flow?
Where bloom the smiles thy ready tongue
Would call to lips that loved thee so?
On what far shore of being tossed
Dost thou resume the genial stave,
And strike again the lyre we lost
By Rappahannock's troubled wave?

If that new world hath hill and stream,
And breezy bank, and quiet dell,
If forests murmur, waters gleam,
And wayside flowers their story tell,
Thy hand ere this has plucked the reed
That wavered by the wooded shore,
Its prisoned soul thy fingers freed,
To float melodious evermore.

So seems it to my musing mood,
So runs it in my surer thought,

That much of beauty, more of good,
For thee the rounded years have wrought;
That life will live, however blown
Like vapor on the summer air;
That power perpetuates its own;
That silence here is music there.

A Woman of the War.

(Margaret Augusta Peterson, 1841–1864.)

Through the sombre arch of that gateway tower
  Where my humblest townsman rides at last,
You may spy the bells of a nodding flower,
  On a double mound that is thickly grassed.

And between the spring and the summer-time,
  Or ever the lilac's bloom is shed,
When they come with banners and wreaths and rhyme,
  To deck the tombs of the nation's dead,

They find there a little flag in the grass,
  And fling a handful of roses down,
And pause a moment before they pass
  To the Captain's grave with the gilded crown.

But if perchance they seek to recall
  What name, what deeds, these honors declare,
They cannot tell, they are silent all
  As the noiseless harebell nodding there.

She was tall, with an almost manly grace,
And young, with strange wisdom for one so young,
And fair, with more than a woman's face;
With dark, deep eyes, and a mirthful tongue.

The poor and the fatherless knew her smile;
The friend in sorrow had seen her tears;
She had studied the ways of the rough world's guile,
And read the romance of historic years.

What she might have been in these times of ours,
At once it is easy and hard to guess;
For always a riddle are half-used powers,
And always a power is lovingness.

But her fortunes fell upon evil days—
If days are evil when evil dies—
And she was not one who could stand at gaze
Where the hopes of humanity fall and rise.

Nor could she dance to the viol's tune,
When the drum was throbbing throughout the land,
Or dream in the light of the summer moon,
While Treason was clenching his mailed hand.

Through the long gray hospital's corridor
She journeyed many a mournful league,
And her light foot fell on the oaken floor
As if it never could know fatigue.

She stood by the good old surgeon's side,
And the sufferers smiled as they saw her stand;
She wrote, and the mothers marveled and cried
At their darling soldiers' feminine hand.

She was last in the ward when the lights burned low
And Sleep called a truce to his foeman Pain;
At the midnight cry she was first to go,
To bind up the bleeding wound again.

For sometimes the wreck of a man would rise,
Weird and gaunt in the watch-lamp's gleam,
And tear away bandage and splints and ties,
Fighting the battle all o'er in his dream.

No wonder the youngest surgeon felt
A charm in the presence of that brave soul,
Through weary weeks, as she nightly knelt
With the letter from home or the doctor's dole.

He heard her called, and he heard her blessed,
With many a patriot's parting breath ;
And ere his soul to itself confessed,
Love leaped to life in those vigils of death.

"O, fly to your home !" came a whisper dread,
"For now the pestilence walks by night."
"The greater the need of me here," she said,
And bared her arm for the lancet's bite.

Was there death, green death, in the atmosphere ?
Was the bright steel poisoned ? Who can tell ?
Her weeping friends gathered beside her bier,
And the clergyman told them all was well.

Well — and alas that it should be so !
When a nation's debt reaches reckoning-day —
Well for it to be able, but woe
To the generation that's called to pay !

Forth from the long gray hospital came
Every boy in blue who could walk the floor ;
The sick and the wounded, the blind and lame,
Formed two long files from her father's door.

There was grief in many a manly breast,
  While men's tears fell as the coffin passed;
And thus she went to the world of rest,
  Martial and maidenly unto the last.

And that youngest surgeon, was he to blame?—
  He held the lancet—Heaven only knows.
No matter; his heart broke all the same,
  And he laid him down, and never arose.

So Death received, in his greedy hand,
  Two precious coins of the awful price
That purchased freedom for this dear land—
  For master and bondman—yea, bought it twice.

Such fates too often such women are for!
  God grant the Republic a large increase,
To match the heroes in time of war,
  And mother the children in time of peace.

The Rivals.

"My friend, we're rivals now no more;
A silent suitor ranks us both—
Her lord henceforth, however loath,
Where mortal rivalries are o'er.
If both her lovers had been one,
And that one such as she had willed,
And life rolled smooth from sun to sun,
Till all her hopes had been fulfilled,
She could not then have laid it by
With more of graceful ease and trust
Than when before an opening sky
She dropped her veil of earthly dust.
I knew myself, I now confess,
To be unworthy of her hand;
But who for that e'er loves the less,
Or finds his courage e'er unmanned?
We all avow, we all believe,
That she we love with reverent heart
Could somehow many a fault retrieve,
And something of herself impart.

Her thoughts were such as none could reach
But with a spirit like her own,
And the low music of her speech
Was soft as Nature's undertone.
Where'er she came she brought a spell
That hallowed all the commonplace;
Whene'er she went a silence fell,
And something shadowed every face.
I loved her with a wild delight,
Unheedful of the Yes or No;
And in the balmy summer night
A score of times I told her so.
I told her how ambition kept
An even step with love's reply,
How half the powers of nature slept
Until awakened by a sigh.
She almost smiled, and all but wept,
And gently put the subject by,—
So gently that I knew my fate
Was then determined past recall,
And you, my rival, once my mate,
Were throned and crowned the lord of all.
But tell me — now that this has past —
By what device, what novel art,
You found the hidden clue at last
And reached the portal of her heart.

For you and I, in days of youth,
Went hand-in-hand in search of truth,
And howsoever either fared
The gain or loss was always shared.
I could not sleep if you were sad,
You could but smile if I was glad,
And both in equal gauge retained
The skill or knowledge either gained.
I marveled you the happy way
Had found, and I so far astray."

"You marveled? And I marveled too;
For I was sure she favored you.
And when her prompt refusal rang
The knell of hope, I could not fend
Against the first, the only pang
Of envy toward my boyhood friend.
But that was neither deep nor strong.
No unbefitting thought could long
Remain a tenant of the soul
Where love of her held high control.
And silent then I took the place
Of one who, distanced in the race,
Still feels, however fortune fall,
'Tis noble to have striven at all.

I even began to take a pride
In thinking he who by my side
Had walked since childhood's earliest day
So fair a prize had borne away ;
Though I, too, wondered what availed
To win your cause where mine had failed."

"Perhaps, unknown to you and me,
Another suitor, who surpassed
All we could ever do or be,
Had won the citadel at last."

"No such appeared. I rather hold
Our rival was no fleshly real,
No living man of mortal mould,
But her own perfect, fair ideal.
What man could hope, in such a case?
Or who presume to emulate
The visionary power and grace
That such a fancy could create?
For her perception was the kind
That, to no force of Nature blind,
With equal vision seems to see
What must, what might, what ought to be.
And she could look through screen and scroll
Of measured words and mannered vole,

To read the secrets of the soul.
I felt this power when first we met—
Felt, feared, but did not quite regret;
I felt it more when last we spoke,
Before her thread of being broke;
Yet knew whate'er she read in me
Was still wrapped up in secrecy."

"Nay, souls like hers are never given
To form ideals this side of heaven.
They do not seek the name of wife
And put a price-mark on their life,
Saying: 'For thus much excellence,
Thus much of manhood, thus much sense,
Or wit, or goodness, I'm for sale;
And nothing less can e'er avail.'
They step into this world of ours
With all their sympathies and powers
Spread to the full to catch the need
Of fellow-men with generous deed,
Or helpful thought, or word of cheer,
Or smile that hope's renewal brings,
Or such encouragement as springs
From simply knowing they are here.
They love as God loves, and they find
Their heart's desire in all mankind.

It seems as if their garment's hem
Made sacred every path it swept,
And everything that walked or crept
Was happier for the sight of them.
Their days glide on like living streams
That find a pre-appointed way;
Their years are eras, and their dreams
Substantial visions made to stay.
There is no twilight in their age;
There is no darkness in their death;
They calmly yield their latest breath,
And leave their lives a heritage.
They do their work and take no toll;
Their gaze is not on any goal;
They never think of Honor's roll.
And such was she — God rest her soul!"

Three Women.

Three women have I known the earth above —
  Three whom I thought superlatively good.
One for her country died, and one for love,
  And one for motherhood.

She who her country served was strong and bright —
  Almost a martyr's fire, a soldier's tread.
Men seeing her were manlier for the sight,
  While women ceased from dread.

She was the flower of earth whose broken heart
  Shed its dear life-drops upon barren ground —
Forgave the blow, smiled and denied the smart,
  Died to conceal the wound.

And she who gave her life for newer life
  Thought only of the little one's career —
Hoped he was equal to the coming strife,
  And passed without a fear.

Three women do I mourn the earth beneath,
  Who left the world forever in their debt.
These three I chiefly grudge to thee, O Death,
  And never can forget.

William Hamilton Gibson.

(1850–1896.)

Who Nature loves by Nature is beloved.
She makes him gentle and she keeps him fair;
By woods and waters where her treasures are
Within his hand she lays a hand ungloved.
For him no stream is stopped, no mountain moved,
No bird-song hushed, nor any branch made bare;
Useless the archer's shaft, the fowler's snare;
Nor for his feet is any pathway grooved.
So Gibson lived and wrote, and drew and dreamed,
Whose sun too early dropped adown the west,
Whose every day with purest visions teemed,
That gave another's day a fresher zest;
And like dear Nature's self he often seemed
To draw no lines 'twixt labor, play, and rest.

Cushing.

(October 27, 1864.)

He wrought a deed of darkness that shines in light eternal.
His errand was destruction, but he builded for all time.
Behooves his grateful countrymen to keep such memories vernal,
When they trace the lines of history or build the poet's rhyme.

'T was the fourth and final season of that struggle for existence
When the great Republic trembled from circumference to core;
When a million men were battling, o'er a thousand miles of distance,
And six hundred warships watching a thousand leagues of shore;

When the schoolhouse was a barrack, and the flag flew
from the steeple;
When women paced the hospital, and old men ran
the mill;
When every throb was quickened in the pulses of the
people,
While the sentries walked in silence and the guns
were never still.

'T was the summer of the Wilderness, that dark and
bloody thicket—
The summer of Cold Harbor, of Atlanta, of Mo-
bile—
When the shadows on the hearthstone seemed to hush
the very cricket,
And Doubt, with sombre presence, sat at every
morning meal.

At the little town of Plymouth, sixteen hundred under
Wessells
Blocked the port and held the post against nine thou-
sand under Hoke—
Held it with their hasty earthworks and their little
wooden vessels,
Till the iron monster Albemarle came down the
Roanoke.

All day long, in heavy columns, the determined foe assaulted;
All day long the stout defenders held the lines before the town.
Though their dead were piled in winrows, yet the rebels never halted,
Till they reached the very muzzles of the guns that struck them down.

But the Albemarle, the monster with her prow beneath the water,
And her sloping sides of iron, and two-hundred-pounder balls,
Came steaming down the river, like a dragon to the slaughter,
To enfilade the land-works and destroy the wooden walls.

Down she came with steady purpose, of the shot and shell unheeding—
Bows on, she struck the Southfield, and the Southfield was a wreck;
Drove adrift the small Miami, with her crew all torn and bleeding,
And her brave commander Flusser lying dead upon the deck.

And the other craft were scattered, and her guns were turned on Plymouth,
Where Wessells' sixteen hundred thus far unmoved had stood.
"Lo, the foe in front we baffle, but behind comes up Behemoth,
And our little fleet has perished, and we are but flesh and blood."

Thus fell Plymouth, and the Albemarle returned unto her mooring,
And the British blockade-runner sailed once more the Roanoke—
Carried rifles, carried powder, carried bullets death-insuring,—
Until young Lieutenant Cushing to his ship's commander spoke:

"Be it mine to meet the monster, with a score of trusty sailors,
In the blackness of the midnight, with torpedo, launch, and fall!
River bed or wreath of glory, grim stockade with sullen jailers,
Wounds or blindness, fail or triumph, life or death, I risk it all!

"Only give me first a furlough, that my sisters and my mother
I may visit once again, lest I shall see them never more."
In his Northern home those dear ones hide the pang they can not smother,
When he hastens back to duty on the Carolina shore.

In a moonless, cloudy midnight Cushing's launch crept up the river—
On her bowsprit a torpedo, in her hold a score of men.
Every tongue was tied to silence, every nerve was on the quiver,
Till the great hulk loomed above them, fast asleep within her den.

Round about her for a rampart, slowly rising, creaking, falling,
Swayed a raft of heavy logging with the motion of the tide.
Cushing's little craft backed water, to the farther shore close hauling,
Then with full steam darted forward, climbed the logs and reached her side.

"Who goes there!" a flash of lightning leaping out
from that dark cover,
And a mammoth shot went crashing through the
launch from stem to stern.
But Cushing pulled his lanyard, and the Albemarle
turned over,
Like a giant on his deathbed when he gives the final
girn.

Eighteen men were killed or captured. One with
Cushing swam the river,
While the bullets pelted round them like the drops
of coming rain —
Swam the river, waded marshes, found a skiff in leafy
cover,
And when morning light was breaking reached the
friendly fleet again.

Thus he wrought the deed of darkness that shines in
light eternal!
Thus his errand was destruction, when he builded
for all time!
And we, his grateful countrymen, must keep such
memories vernal,
On History's heroic page and in the household
rhyme.

My Ship.

'T was a gallant craft as ever sailed,
And a marvelous merry crew she bore,
When with canvas set and colors nailed
I sent her out to a distant shore.
I sent her out with a broad command
To cruise at will through the Golden Isles,
And bring me the product of every land
That the soul delights or the sense beguiles.

Tough are the timbers that compass her sides,
And the lines are graceful that curve to her keel,
And she leaves a foamy wake as she rides
Secure with her steadiest man at the wheel.
And that foamy wake in my dreams I see,
Where whitens the wave for a thousand miles;
And the man at the wheel, unmindful of me,
Is looking ahead for the Golden Isles.

If waking I walk on the lonely shore,
The foam of her furrow has melted away,

And I know that her sailors are merry no more,
And her pilot I know must be withered and gray.
But I still believe that her ensign burns,
And on her brown canvas the sunlight smiles,
As heavily laden she homeward turns,
Or cruises yet 'mid the Golden Isles.

And I never doubt she will surely come,
Riding in on some happy tide,
Strained and battered, but bearing home
All that she sought o'er the ocean wide.
And if Father Charon should pluck my sleeve
And point to his skiff, with a laughing lip
I'd do his bidding, and still believe
I am only going to meet my ship.

When Foolish Words.

When foolish words have been forgot,
And wiser memory reads between —
Like some dear child's handwriting seen
Half-blindly through an awkward blot —
How clearly runs the legend then:
There's something more in friendship's faith
Than careless hand or vagrant breath
Can make or break with tongue or pen.

Yet foolish words will have their sway,
Like smoke that wraps a generous fire
And forces tears and rouses ire,
And seem decisive for a day.
I owe your memory heavy debt,
My friend of many sacred years;
But would you double these arrears,
Learn also sometimes to forget.

Autumn.

What sudden splendor loads the falling year!
Like an old man whose honors come too late,
Yet walks with regal step and brow sedate
The purple pathway to his gilded bier.
Sharp-tongued is Fate to utter words austere
When her keen glance upon the dial-plate —
Where neither bribe of love nor force of hate
Can stop the shadow in its swift career —
Catches the hour the mortal must not pass.
So long as sorrow and distress endure,
How calmly she denies our prayers, alas! —
Patience should be, where all things are secure —
But grimly she delights to turn the glass
Just when its sands run brightest and most pure.

A Boy's Poem.

Over the water and under the sky,
Dreamily sailing, the clouds go by.
Fleecy and white as a wild swan's breast,
Darkened and dim as the mountain's crest,
Reddened with flashes of sunset fire,
Rolled into portents and effigies dire,
Smiling or frowning for calm or for storm,—
Whatever the color, whatever the form,—
Daily and nightly the clouds go by,
Over the water and under the sky.

Over the water and under the sky,
Steadily sailing, the ships go by.
Bearing away on the Arctic breeze,
Floating along to the tropic seas,
Beating about at the stormy cape,
Cleaving the fog like a ghostly shape,
Carrying cargoes for peaceful trade,
Bristling with guns for destruction made,—
Sailing forever, the ships go by,
Over the water and under the sky.

Over the earth and under the sky,
The great procession of life goes by.
Some in laughter and some in tears,
Leaping in childhood or crippled in years,
Toiling along under wearisome load,
Galloping off on a flowery road,
Hopeful and hopeless, the small and the great,
The captive in chains and the monarch in state,—
All in the endless procession go by,
Over the landscape and under the sky.

Over the landscape and under the sky,
Dreamily roving, our souls go by.
Seeking the wonders of every clime,
Reading the tales of a far-away time,
Marching where thousands keep step to the drum,
Brooding in solitude sightless and dumb,
Taking the world at the worst or the best,
Willing to labor and careless of rest,
If eternity finds us, when life's gone by,
Under the daisies and over the sky.

All Partners.

(These verses, which refer to the execution of President Garfield's assassin, were published originally in the New York *Sun*, June 30, 1882. That which they foretold came to pass in September, 1901, and was the occasion of the lines that follow.)

Yes, hang him, of course! He deserves to rise
Where his heels may dangle o'er Haman's head.
At least we shall have one scoundrel the less,
Conveniently crazed in his fiendishness,
To walk our streets in an innocent guise,
With his hidden pistol and stealthy tread.

But when we have hanged him, what comes then?
Had he any confederates? Let us see!
For the law is imperfect and lame at best,
And censure's weight should be made to rest
On as many as possible, women or men,
Who have joined in breaking its just decree.

When a youth the Ephesian temple fired,
That his name, as he said, might live thro' time,

'Twas decreed that it never be written or
spoken —
A law by the chroniclers quickly broken,
Who've given him all that he desired,
And offered his chosen reward for crime.

Thus you, the historians, you are to blame.
You offered this fellow a heavy bribe:
If he'd only compass a shameful deed,
A sickening sorrow to all who read,
You'd give him something as good as fame
To any one of his vulgar tribe.

Then you, the reporters, hungry for news,
And nibbling at nothings for printed prate,
You've dosed us to death with his nauseous name,
With how he looks, and whence he came,
And what he drinks, and how he chews,
Till the simple reader thinks him great.

And we who have read are guilty beside:
To be curious hold we a sacred right,
As we smother a fainting man in the street,
Or run to evil with hurrying feet,
Making a crowd where the felons may hide,
And balking justice to gratify sight.

The quack who has striven the law to impede,
The garrulous parson to decency blind,
Every fool who has asked for his autograph,
Or greeted his jests with a brutal laugh,
Is an accessory after the deed,
And before the next we shall have of its kind.

When a few more years bring another such blow,
And the head of the nation lies in state,
While our streets with the emblems of mourning are filled,
And door-posts are darkened and songs are stilled,
While we follow the funeral, sad and slow,
We shall think of these things, God help us! too late.

Thanksgiving.

(1901.)

In the freshness of our sorrow,
In the darkness of our grief,
With a loss that no to-morrow
Can repair or give relief,—
With a cloud upon our history
Such as fades not in the years,
And the burden of a mystery
That forever forces tears,—
How shall any heart be grateful
As becomes this festal day,
With the sinful and the hateful
Driving happy thoughts away?
With the manhood held so proudly,
That grew up through fateful times,
And the faith that spoke so loudly
In orations and in rhymes,
There was still a viper crawling
Through the garden we had made,
And the stroke of fate was falling
When our guards were least afraid.

That the nation's will is thwarted
By the vilest of the vile,
And the worst with best consorted,
Do we render thanks the while?

Not by these, which are but outward
Acts and feelings of the hour,
Must our thoughts be driven doubtward
And our faith resign its power.
We give thanks that evil forces,
Malice-laden, are so small,
That the law's majestic courses
Falter not, whate'er befall.
We give thanks that he who perished
On that sunny autumn day
Left a memory to be cherished
Till the earth shall pass away;
That his dying, as his living,
Was a lesson for our youth,
With no flaw, and no misgiving
Of the grace and force of truth;
Of the might of earnest manhood,
Tense in war and calm in peace,
To unite our wondrous country
And its honor to increase.

Then from high or lowly stations,
From the East unto the West,
When we think of those our martyrs
Who have passed unto their rest,
Let us thank the God of Nations
That we are so richly blest.

The Land of Noddy.

A Lullaby.

Put away the bauble and the bib !
Smooth out the pillow in the crib !
Softly on the down
Lay the baby's crown,
Warm around its feet
Tuck the little sheet,—
Snug as a pea in a pod !
With a yawn and a gape,
And a dreamy little nap,
We will go, we will go,
To the Landy-andy-pandy
Of Noddy-oddy-poddy,
To the Landy-andy-pand
Of Noddy-pod.

There in the Shadow-Maker's tent,
After the twilight's soft descent,
We'll lie down to dreams
Of milk in flowing streams ;

And the Shadow-Maker's baby
Will lie down with us, may be,
On the soft mossy pillow of the sod.
In a drowse and a doze,
All asleep from head to toes,
We will lie, we will lie,
In the Landy-andy-pandy
Of Noddy-oddy-poddy,
In the Landy-andy-pand
Of Noddy-pod.

Then when the morning breaks,
Then when the robin wakes,
We'll leave the drowsy dreams,
And the twinkling starry gleams,
We'll leave the little tent,
And the wonders in it pent,
To return to our own native sod.
With a hop and a skip,
And a jump and a flip,
We will come, we will come,
From the Landy-andy-pandy
Of Noddy-oddy-poddy,
From the Landy-andy-pand
Of Noddy-pod.

A Rhyme of the Rain.

Like a blotch upon a beauty
Comes a cloud across the sky ;
Like an unrelenting duty
Fall the raindrops from on high.
Like death upon a holiday,
Like sleigh-ride upon wheels,
Like jilting on a jolly day,
Like medicine at meals,
Sets in a storm preposterous,
Of every plan the bane :
Now sullen and now boisterous,
Malicious, mean, or roisterous,
But always moist and moisture-ous,
Forever on the gain,
And never on the wane,
Bringing sudden consternation,
And a long-drawn botheration,
To the men upon the house-top, and the cattle in the plain.

How it pours, pours, pours,
In a never-ending sheet!
How it drives beneath the doors!
How it soaks the passer's feet!
How it rattles on the shutter!
How it rumples up the lawn!
How 'twill sigh, and moan, and mutter,
From darkness until dawn!—
Making human life a burden,
Making joy a flimsy wile,
Making bondage seem a guerdon
In the rainless fields of Egypt, by the clever river Nile.
Yet how pleasantly the rain,
With its delicate refrain,
May sing away the sultriness of summer day or night!
Set the drooping grass a-springing,
And the robin's throat a-ringing,
Fill the meadow-lands with verdure, and the hills with glistening light!
Or in April, fickle-hearted,
Ere the chill has quite departed,
That the frosts, and the snows, and the howling winds have brought,
When all the signs of gladness
Take a sombre tinge of sadness,

For days and deeds that come no more, and dreams
that fell to nought!
Then, in half unwelcome leisure
'T is a sort of solemn pleasure
To sit beside the ingle,
Or to lie beneath the shingle,
And listen to the patter of the rain, rain, rain,
To the drip, drip, drip,
And the patter, patter, patter,
On the roof, and the shutter, and the pane.

But whether night or day-time,
In harvest-time or play-time,
And whether pour or patter,
The early rain or latter
Reigns over human purpose, and plays with human
fears —
Sets mighty armies shouting,
Sends little Cupid pouting,
Turns trusting into doubting.
And triumph into tears.

O! sadly I remember
One treacherous September,
When the autumn equinoctial came a week or more
too soon.

I had started with a cousin
For the church, among a dozen
Maids and matrons who were airing
The fall styles, and gayly wearing
The very newest, sweetest thing in bonnets 'neath the Moon.
And midway of the journey,
Like a thousand knights in tourney,
The leveled lances of the rain drove furious at our breast;
And the fall styles fell and wilted,
On the dames so proudly kilted,
And by sudden transformation worse than worst became the best.
Though I now am sere and yellow,
I was then a valiant fellow,
And esteemed it more a joy to serve the ladies than to live.
Imagine, then, my feelings,
'Mid the shrinkings and the squealings,
When my water-proof umbrella proved a sieve, sieve, sieve!
When my shiny new umbrella proved a sieve!
What a sorry lot of mortals
Sat within the sacred portals,

In their mermaid millinery looking sad, sad, sad!
Nothing dry except the sermon,
Which discoursed on dews of Hermon
And the streams that, saith the Scripture, do make glad, glad, glad!
So the preacher praised the waters
To those mothers, wives, and daughters,
Every dripping, draggled one of whom was mad, mad, mad!
And my bright and handsome cousin—
Sweetest girl among the dozen,
Or among a dozen dozen you might meet along the way,
Then a hopeful, sprightly maiden,
Full of fancies laughter-laden,
Dates the ruin of her chances from that rainy Sabbath day.
She had spent her last round dollar
For the bonnet, gloves, and collar
That should have proved effective on the smart young pulpiteer;
But he rode home in the carriage
Of her rival, and their marriage
Was solemnized (my cousin's word) in less than half a year.

But gladly I remember
One crimson-hued September,
When we strayed along the hedges and within the gorgeous wold;
A merry autumn party
Of men and maidens hearty,
Rejoicing in the foliage of scarlet and of gold.
We saw in lessening distance
The fair things of existence;
And ere we thought of turning,
Or heeded sign of warning,
We heard upon the fallen leaves the footsteps of the rain.
Away went rules conventional!
And I, with haste intentional,
Just clapped my good old broad-brim on the head of Annie Trayne.
That extemporized umbrella
Threw cold water on a fellow
Who was courting, in a lazy sort of way, Miss Annie Trayne;
While it made me quite a gallant,
And a fine young man of talent,
In the eyes and estimation of the beauteous Annie Trayne.

In the dreamy summer haze
Of my far-off boyish days,
I had chased the luring butterfly across the grassy plain,
But I never threw my hat
O'er a prize so fair as that
When it sheltered, caught, and gave me the lovely
Annie Trayne.
And I've blessed that gentle rain
Again and yet again,
For the flowers it set blooming in my life:
For the crimson and the gold
That adorn the little fold
Where I find an autumn shelter with my wife.

An Indian Love-Song.

From his ambush in thy shadowy eyes, Love sped a
shaft at mine;
'T was feathered with a shining tress, and barbed with
a smile divine.
My heart is all a-quiver; but hear me while I sing—
O, let me be thy beau, and I will never snap the
string!

Then clad in noiseless moccasins the feet of the years
shall fall;
For I will cherish thee, my love, till Time shall scalp
us all.

Not with the glittering wampum have I come thy
smiles to woo;
But to offer a cabin passage down life's river in my
canoe;
And to beguile the voyage, if thou wilt come aboard,
Till sunset fire the waters the fire-water shall be poured,

While clad in softest moccasins the feet of the years
shall fall;
And I will cherish thee, my love, till Time shall scalp
us all.

My pipe of peace thy frosty scorn has shattered, stem
and bowl;
But a thousand thongs from thy dear hide are knotted
round my soul.
Safe from the swoop of tomahawk my dove shall ever
be;
And if Famine stare us in the face, I'll jerk my heart
for thee.

So, clad in noiseless moccasins the feet of the years
shall fall;
And I will cherish thee, my love, till Time shall scalp
us all.

Ninety-Nine in the Shade.

O for a lodge in a garden of cucumbers!
O for an iceberg or two at control!
O for a vale that at mid-day the dew cumbers!
O for a pleasure-trip up to the pole!

O for a little one-story thermometer,
With nothing but zeroes all ranged in a row!
O for a big double-barreled hygrometer,
To measure the moisture that rolls from my brow!

O that this cold world were twenty times colder!
(That's irony red hot, it seemeth to me.)
O for a turn of its dreaded cold shoulder!
O what a comfort an ague would be!

O for a grotto frost-lined and rill-riven,
Scooped in the rock under cataract vast!
O for a winter of discontent even!
O for wet blankets judiciously cast!

O for a soda-fount spouting up boldly
From every hot lamp-post against the hot sky!
O for proud maiden to look on me coldly,
Freezing my soul with a glance of her eye!

Then O for a draught from a cup of cold pizen!
And O for a through ticket, *via* Coldegrave,
To the baths of the Styx, where a thick shadow lies on
And deepens the chill of its dark-running wave!

The Gate of Tears.

The summer-house was old and worn,
  A Moorish roof of painted pine,
On seven slender shafts upborne,
  Half hidden by a clambering vine,
And half in sunlight, while the leaves
  Of two great maples flecked the floor
  With dancing shapes all shadowed o'er,
And rustled round the broken eaves.
It stood upon a point of land
  Far poised above a silver flood,
And the deep gulf on either hand
By swallow-flights alone was spanned,
  Or fleecy clouds in flying scud.
What lovers may have whispered there
In silences of evening air,
What robbers at the midnight hour
Conspired to clutch crime's bloody dower,
What tuneless poet watched the stars,
What hermit soul through mortal bars
Withdrawn from every mortal care,—

I reck not, for I see it still
As in one dreamy afternoon
When Summer's strength was freshly hewn,
And Autumn's haze was on the hill.
Then we were children — happy time!
For this old world seemed shining new,
And life was but a rattling rhyme,
And all its pretty tales were true.
We played the old familiar games
Until they palled upon the sense,
And personated squires and dames,
And knaves and knights, in grave pretence,
Till Helen, flinging from her lap
The autumn leaves, sprang up and cried,
"I know a game we have not tried —
We'll play at finding on the map!"

She brought the atlas from the house,
And spread it on the arbor floor;
We clustered round and conned it o'er,
With wary eyes and thoughtful brows.
The turn went round until it fell
To Arthur, him of fewest years
Among us, and he pondered well,
Then bade us find the Gate of Tears.

What mighty travels now began —
What voyages in unknown seas!
We cruised among the Cyclades,
And visited the Cingalese,
And lingered at the Isle of Man.
We crossed the Himalayan slopes,
And climbed the Mountains of the Moon;
We trod Peruvian bridge of ropes,
And lowland dyke, and Danish dune;
We sailed the great Australian Bight,
We basked awhile on tropic shores,
We pulled the daring whaler's oars,
And lost ourselves in Arctic night.
On Orinoco's tangled banks
The chattering monkeys mocked our quest;
And in the red man's straggling ranks
We thrid the rivers of the West;
We followed up the Niger's course,
And all the Dnieper's muddy miles,
And where Ontario's waters force
St. Lawrence through his Thousand Isles.
With vague conjecture, jests, and jeers,
We spelled out many a foreign name,
But still were baffled by the game,
And could not find the Gate of Tears.

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"You give it up," said Arthur—"Good!
But see how plain it now appears—
A voyage through the Red Sea's flood
Will bring you to the Gate of Tears."
The Red Sea's flood, we knew not then,
We've known too well in after years;
For time and truth have made us men—
Swift time, stern truths told o'er again—
And all have found the Gate of Tears.

O Helen of the golden hair,
Of all thy little mates that day,
Not one but would have borne thy care,
Or plucked his own right eye away,
To save those dark, deep, lustrous spheres
Of thine from sorrow's bitter tears.
It might not be; for thine the lot
Of all good women since the fall:
One half of life beside the cot,
The other half beside the pall—
Presiding over birth and death,
Our earliest and our latest breath—
Our entrance on a life of fears,
Our exit at the Gate of Tears.

O Father Land, of lands the best,
O Mother Freedom, dearer still,
What mystery moves the mighty will,
That many days must still be dressed
In sable weeds, and pain and loss,
The mourner's tear, the martyr's cross,
Appear wherever we can see
One step advances liberty?

So was it when our Washington
Thro' seven long years kept heart of hope,
From Cambridge elm to Trenton slope,
From Valley Forge to Yorktown's sun.

So was it, too, when Lincoln led
His people through the bloody years
That Fate exacted as her price
To shrive us of a hideous vice,—
Then bowed his own most reverend head,
And left us at the Gate of Tears.

So when our third great President,
His welcoming hand extended free,
Was struck with murderous intent
By treacherous tool of anarchy.

The whole world breathing prayers of hope,
The nation quivering with its fears,
For him the gates of triumph ope,
For us, alas! the Gate of Tears.

So may it be when you and I,
And all of us, uncertain stand,
Compelled to cross, though fain to fly,
The shadows of the border-land:
With tranquil mind that knows at length
All its own weakness, and its strength,
Following in quiet self-control
The light that shines from out the soul,
The wisdom never born of years,
That leads where clearer suns may rise,
And show the gloomy Gate of Tears
An outer gate of Paradise.

On the Beach at Amagansett.

Give me a handful of the glittering sand
That's rolled about by every breaking wave ;
Sit here upon the margin of the land,
And meet my questioning with answer brave.

Whence and how came it to this pleasant shore ?
"From the far north, ten thousand years ago,
Crept down the mighty avalanche that bore
A half-world load of rock and ice and snow.

"And somewhere in its cold, capacious breast
Were wrapped the deep foundations of this isle,
Torn from the Arctic mountains' frozen crest,
And dragged a year a mile — a year a mile."

What legend from those days could tell you this ?
"Where Hudson perished and where Franklin failed,
From many a broken ledge and cliff we miss
The very rocks your sands have here impaled.

"The sands themselves are but the shining grist
Crushed from the gravel in that mighty mill,
As, moving with remorseless roll and twist,
The giant glacier worked its patient will."

But how and whence that Arctic quarry rose?
"'T is plainly written on its splintered side:
Millions of years before, 'mid earthquake throes,
'T was heaved aloft by some volcanic tide.

"And there it rested, looking o'er the plain,
Silent and solemn as the starry flocks,
Until the circling ages in their train
Brought round the cycle of the equinox."

Tell me what placed it in the depths of earth.
"Go back in thought a myriad ages more,
And see this rolling globe of mighty girth
Hurled from the Sun with all its mineral store.

"Mingled and kneaded in the glowing mass
Was all we have of rock or tree or air,
Slowly to be evolved as changes pass,
Fires melt, frosts crack, winds blow, and waters wear."

And whence your Sun? and whence his motive force?
"Sprung from a nebula that floated free.
Rotation was the law that ruled his course,
And all else followed by necessity."

And whence the nebula? How does it come
The substance of this sand exists at all?
I wait for answer — and your lips are dumb.
The march of Science leads us to a wall.

Change upon change, we tell the changes o'er;
But genesis of matter still escapes,
And more of searching only brings us more
Mysterious substance in familiar shapes.

While the great riddle thus remains unsolved,
And Science can not pass beyond its tether,
However worlds and systems are evolved,
The sage and simpleton must stand together.

At Fifty-two.

If I were Shakespeare, I should die to-day.
If I were Lincoln, I should set my hand
Unto the hardest task that e'er was planned
Of complex forces and unknown assay.

If I were Washington, the land would leap
With gladness for a freedom newly won;
If Cæsar, I should cross the Rubicon;
And if Magellan, sail the greater deep.

Burns, Byron, Collins, Motherwell, and Praed —
By fifteen years I have o'erpassed the time
When poets die, without one worthy rhyme
Or verse whose color will not surely fade.

Seven years I am beyond the martial age;
But sword or banner hangs not on my wall,
Where shadows pass, like some dim funeral
Of valorous comrade or preceptor sage.

What Rubicons I fancied I should cross!
But every brook is either bridged or dry.
There seems no more to be a call for high
Heroic action — save in patient loss.

I've closed no gulf that parted friend from friend,
Nor widened any fertile stream of thought:
My whole half century figures up to nought —
Unless achievement be not life's sole end —

Unless there must be for whom good's designed,
As well as those through whom it comes to pass—
Reflective souls, wherein, as in a glass,
Creative thinkers meet their pictured mind.

I am not Shakespeare — but his plays are mine.
I am not Lincoln — but I saw that face,
The saddest and the wisest of our race;
Nor Washington — but Freedom's heir in line.

So something still of triumph there must be
In lowly places; and before the mast
A man may hope that he shall come at last,
With his great Captain, to the tranquil sea.

Salvage.

(Passages from occasional poems.)

THE STAGE RIDE.

The sandy highway, fringed with green,
By sparkling water-courses led
Along some ancient river's bed,
With wealth of intervale between,
Winds upward toward the purple range,
As journeys one in morning dream,
And bridges many a murmuring stream,
And revels in continual change.
Just over there the mountains lie,
The quiet brood of quiet sky;
Just over there their shadow falls.
We wind through many a narrow dell,
And vale whose bounds more gently swell,
Right onward toward the rocky walls;
And still through this delusive air
Their rugged sides above us bend
And seem to mark our journey's end,
Just over there, just over there.
But lo! the clouds, in tatters dressed,
Come clambering o'er the mountain crest,

And tumbling here, or settling there,
Now buoyed a while in denser air,
Now clinging to some rocky ledge,
  In sunlight dark, in shadow pale,
Creep slowly down as if to wage
  An Indian warfare on the vale.
Our leaders snuff the coming shower,
And put forth more determined power:
Our wheels more eager crunch the sand,
We grasp the rail with firmer hand,
Hold hats against the stiffening breeze,
More nimbly dodge the drooping trees,
Fall helpless in the ambushed jolts,
Dream timidly of breaking bolts,
Suspend a while the anxious breath
Where one mis-step might hurl to death,
Dash at the low hill's rocky face,
Spin like a peg-top round its base,
Go thundering through the heaving bridge,
And roll along the causeway's ridge,—
Till horses, driver, men, and freight
  Seem but an animated whole,
With one quick impulse all elate,
  The thrill of one impassioned soul.

NEW AND OLD.

New lamps for old! — and shall we have more light
On any mystery of our mortal days,
Since Eighty-five has set in endless night,
And Eighty-six has risen on our gaze
With brighter rays?

New hopes for old desires, forgotten now,
That last year often broke our nightly rest,
Tried the whole heart, and taxed the furrowed brow,
And sent the fancy nor'-by-south-by-west,
On foolish quest!

New blossoms for dead fruit, and sweets in hive!
This sturdy branch of Time's perennial tree,
Which counts its harvests up to eighty-five,
Must bear of golden pippins two or three
For you and me.

New loves for hatreds dead! Fresh faith and strong,
For worn-out grudges and resentments old,
For all the brood of prejudice and wrong,
The petty spites and malice manifold
That now are cold.

New blood for watery Age! New brawn for Youth!
Fresh heaps of fuel for Ambition's fires!
New explorations in the realms of Truth,
New songs of genius from unheard-of lyres
And silent choirs!

New friends, perhaps — but old ones none the less!
New passions, possibly; for who can tell
What shape the passing cloud will take, or guess
What current bears him, or what tempest swell
Bodes ill or well?

YOUTH AND VERSE.

Verse is the gift of youth. The song-birds cease
Their warblings when the springtime blossoms fall;
The summers strengthen and the fruits increase
To a more sober music; and the tall
Ripe grain that tosses like a plumèd pall
Nods to funereal measures, till at last
The sickle undermines the golden wall,
The dream of glory fades into the past,
And through the stubble cries the shrill autumnal blast.

Youth may be pardoned for its lack of thought,
Its careless rhymes and repetitious song;
It can but know the little that is taught,
It can but guess at life — and guesses wrong.
But in the bubbling spirit it is strong,
That stirs and strives within the blood and brain,
Propels the rolling world its course along,
And drags the cautious elders in its train,
And scales the mountain height, and dares the furious main.

GREAT AND SMALL.

Our lives are little, but our times are great.
We come, we see, we linger, and we pass;
Weave but a single thread in web of state,
Or give the field a single spear of grass.
We are too often like a boyish class,
Where each one stumbles through his dozen lines,
And looks bewildered at the stubborn mass
Of foreign words and intricate designs,—
But lo! when all is done, through all an Iliad shines.

CIVIL WAR.

Hamlets unheard-of fifty miles away
Became historic when their streets ran blood,
And gentle streams that through the meadows play,
With rippling song that only sang of good,
Told henceforth to the overhanging wood
A tale of sorrow and unending tears,
And bore a stain that neither ebb nor flood
Can wash away through all the coming years,
Till Greed forget his crimes, and Sympathy her fears.

Yet wisdom was not wanting to the tale,
And History wrote new marvels in her age.
She saw, one April morn, the glories pale
Of all the naval heroes on her page.
In single ship or battle-line they wage
Successful warfare ; but behold at bay
Fortress and fire-raft, hulk with chain and kedge,
Gunboat and ram, all blazing in the fray,
And all by our great sailor conquered in a day.

In ancient times the spirits of the slain
Were said to fight again in upper air,

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While still their comrades struggled on the plain
Or rose in ghostly ranks to join them there.
But in our western Alleghanies, where
The Chattanooga through its valley goes,
An army clambered up the mountain stair,
Plunged into clouds, and then beyond them rose,
And crossed the yellow Moon, pursuing still their foes.

There was one Marathon in Greece of old;
There is one Waterloo in Belgium now;
And yonder, nestled in a gentle fold
Of the Blue Ridge, along a hillock's brow,
Lies a great field whereon the reverent plow
Follows the selfsame lines that once it drew;
For there three thousand patriots sealed their vow
To be to freedom and their country true,
And made of Gettysburg a three-days' Waterloo.

There, as it should be when a people rise
In the true majesty of final law,
Was little of the tactics of the wise
Or brilliant general, neither did it draw
From accident or from opponent's flaw
The great result. No whirl of Fortune's wheel
Determined who the bitter leek should gnaw.

The brains were with the hands that held the steel,
And stubborn will prevailed against a fiery zeal.

From such, of such, for such, a great man rose,
Amid the rudeness of the wondrous West,
And carried all the burden of our woes
With gentle words and sympathetic breast,
And ever edged his wisdom with a jest,
While deepened still the lines that care had worn,
His finger on the people's pulses pressed,
Until the burden and the heat were borne,
Then vanished like a dream,— and we forever mourn.

A FAREWELL.

Once to these college halls I bade farewell,
And twice returned to read a simple measure,
To tickle fancy with the rhythmic spell
That gives an equal glow to dross and treasure;
And now a third attempt, by your good pleasure.
Be this the last. And let some younger voice
Hereafter wile away your evening's leisure
With graceful art on themes of lighter choice,
That sadden less the ear and more the heart rejoice.

For I have dwelt so many years afar
From this the scene of youth's delicious days,
And turned so often to the evening star
That dropped on you the plummet of its rays,
And felt the rush, the swirl, the swift amaze,
As day chased day in ever hastening flight,—
I could but trace again the earlier ways,
And speak once more the feelings, true but trite,
Of one who knows full well 't is time to say Good night!

A drowsy infant when your story's done—
A schoolboy tinkering at his broken skate—
A youth who sees the final dance begun—
A lover leaning o'er a garden gate—
A maiden listening for the word of fate—
A soldier thinking of to-morrow's fight—
A statesman conscious of expiring date—
A watcher doubtful of the morning light,—
I understand them all: they hate to say Good night!

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